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SUBJECT: VATICAN: MEDIA RESPONSE TO POPE'S RESPONSE ADDRESS  
FAVORABLE

REF: A. VATICAN 199

1B. VATICAN 201

¶1. September 21 reaction by Vatican-based media to Pope Benedict's September 20th general audience remarks was strongly positive. Most press outlets reported the pope used the occasion to again express regret that his remarks on Islam had been misunderstood and to emphasize his "profound respect for Muslims." Many articles emphasized his effort to distance himself from the citation of Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Paleologus which had initially precipitated the strong reaction from the Islamic world.

¶2. Some media outlets are reporting on September 21 that reaction to the pope's initial address are lessening. Catholic News Service reported on September 21 that he had hoped his address in Regensburg would be viewed as "an encouragement to a dialogue that is positive and also self-critical, both among religions and between modern reason and the Christian faith." Some media reported reaction from some quarters that the pope had already gone as far as he should -- perhaps too far.

¶3. Meanwhile, the media also noted on September 21 that "security around the Vatican was discreetly increased yesterday, following vague threats made by extremist groups on Internet sites recently. Concurrently, European papers reported on September 21 that Mehmet Ali Agca--the imprisoned former member of an extreme right-wing group in Turkey who attempted to assassinate Pope John Paul II in 1981--had warned Benedict XVI not travel to Turkey in November "because his life would be at risk."

¶4. Post looks forward to continued reporting from posts in Muslim countries on the reaction there.

SANDROLINI